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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAN, OES/OA, AND OES/OMC
NOAA FOR NMFS AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EFIS](#) [PGOV](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: CANADA'S PRIORITIES FOR THE ST. JOHN'S CONFERENCE
ON HIGH SEAS FISHERIES

REF: A. OTTAWA 1142 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. OTTAWA 983 (NOTAL)

[1](#)1. Sensitive but Unclassified.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: As the host of the Conference on the Governance of High Seas Fisheries and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, May 1-5 in St. John's, Newfoundland, the Government of Canada will be pursuing recommendations for concrete measures to strengthen Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Canadian officials say they do not wish to re-examine the rules and norms by which RFMOs function, but rather, how the organizations can ensure compliance among member and non-member states. Fisheries issues are a hot-button issue in St. John's, Newfoundland, and there is some GOC concern that local media will portray the conference as yet another failure by Canada to limit foreign overfishing on the Grand Banks by favoring diplomacy over concrete measures. The conference appears to be a priority for Prime Minister Paul Martin, who reportedly plans to address the conference. End Summary.

STRENGTHENING RFMOs

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to Alan Kessel, Deputy Legal Adviser and Director General of the Bureau of Legal Affairs, Foreign Affairs Canada, 16 ministers have already confirmed their attendance at the St. John's conference. Kessel said that including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there will be about 45 delegations attending the meeting, most representing signatories to the United Nations Fishing Agreement (UNFA). Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Geoff Regan will lead the Canadian delegation, and Prime Minister Martin may open the conference (see below).

[1](#)4. (SBU) Kessel explained that for the GOC, the key issue is how to strengthen RFMOs and the UN Fishing Agreement under existing rules. Rather than decide new regulations for high seas fishing, Kessel said, the conference will focus on elements of successful RFMO governance. Representatives of several RFMOs, such as the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), and others will also attend the conference. Kessel said that better coordination of fisheries science research among nations and RFMOs will be one of the key topics for consideration at the conference.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The meeting will not specifically focus on flags of convenience, Kessel said, although illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU) in general will be a major theme. According to Kessel, the GOC sees IUU fishing as a global problem, and the conference will be a way to advance the issue as such. The RFMOs and UNFA signatories, in the GOC's view, need to bring local fishermen around the world into a worldview in which they, the fishermen, see themselves as global conservation stewards. Kessel said the GOC hopes that the conference will produce a realistic strategy for all nations, not just UNFA signatories, to begin to communicate a global view of fisheries conservation to their local stakeholders.

Newfoundland: A Good Place to Start

[1](#)6. (SBU) The message of global conservation that the GOC wants other nations to carry around the world will face a skeptical local audience in Newfoundland and Canada's maritime provinces. Local fishers are nearly unanimous in blaming the collapse of groundfish stocks in the 1990s on foreign overfishing on the Grand Banks, along with the GOC's failure to control the foreign fishing fleets. Provincial leaders and some members of the federal Parliament consider NAFO to be ineffective, and want Ottawa to implement "custodial management," or unilaterally extend its fisheries enforcement beyond the 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to encompass virtually all of the Grand Banks.

[1](#)7. (SBU) Kessel conceded that it will be difficult for the Canadian federal government to control local expectations for

the conference in St. John's. No matter what the outcome, local media may well portray the event in terms of the GOC attempting (and failing) to limit foreign overfishing on the Grand Banks. Managing the fishery and the political climate are both difficult tasks, Kessel noted, adding that Canadian Navy frigates will be conducting fisheries patrols on the Grand Banks this year.

Comment: A Global Issue for Canada?

18. (SBU) Unless an election campaign forces a change, Kessel said, Prime Minister Martin is expected to address the opening of the St. John's conference. He noted that Martin has spoken about fisheries and oceans conservation to a range of world leaders, including President Bush, French President Jacques Chirac, and Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin. Just as U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair has brought African development and HIV/Aids to the G-8, Kessel said, Martin is apparently planning to bring oceans and fisheries to the forefront of global environmental issues. It is far from clear, however, how such an undertaking will be received by the Prime Minister's domestic political audience.

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